

Info4U



&
**North Hertfordshire
Housing Partnership**



Home4U User Guide



WELCOME TO

Info4U

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Helping you find a home in Stevenage or North Hertfordshire

Do you need us to explain Home4U?

In Stevenage you can contact the Customer Service Centre on **01438 242666** or textphone **01438 242150** (for people who are deaf or have hearing difficulties).

In Stevenage there is an automated document reader in the centre that reads text aloud. It is free for you to use. You can visit the Customer Service Centre in Danestrete, Stevenage (to the left of HSBC) who will deal with enquiries about Home4U.

In North Herts the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership is made up of North Herts District Council, North Hertfordshire Homes and Howard Cottage Housing Association. You can contact North Hertfordshire District Council on **01462 474000** or visit the Council Offices in Gernon Road, Letchworth and speak to a member of staff. You can contact North Hertfordshire Homes on **01462 633397**. You can contact Howard Cottage Housing Association on **01462 683307**.

At both centres there are computers for you to place your bids online, again free of charge. You can also log on to: www.home4u.org.uk where there are email enquiry forms.

We can make information available on request:

- In large print
- On audio (information on CD)
- In different languages

If you have other requirements, please contact us to discuss alternative ways of taking part in the Home4U scheme. We will do our best to help.



Home4U is our Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

The scheme is for all social housing (this is the name for all homes that are owned by Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership, or by Registered Providers (RP's) and all properties will be let in this way. Home4U gives you more choice about where you want to live. In the past you may have waited on the Housing Register until the Council selected a property for you. Now you can decide which properties you would like to be considered for. Asking to be considered for one of the homes advertised is called 'bidding'. Later in the magazine we will show you the different ways you can bid for a property.

Home4U is available to everyone on the Housing Register, including:

- Transfer Applicants - existing tenants who would like to transfer to a new home
- Homeseekers - new applicants who are waiting on the Housing Register.

All social housing will now be allocated in this way so if you want to be re-housed you will have to take part. The feedback section of the Home4U magazine will help you to understand the housing situation in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire. You will be able to see how many properties of each type are available, how many people have applied for them and the band and points level of successful North Herts applicants and the band and priority date of successful Stevenage applicants. If you decide that you may not be successful you can look at other ways to solve your housing difficulties.

You should be able to find all the information you need in this guide, but if you have any questions about Home4U you can contact the Customer Service Centres or the Lettings team of Stevenage Borough Council or North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership. Contact details are available in this guide, the Home4U magazine and also at www.home4u.org.uk

OPENING HOURS

Stevenage Customer Services Centre

Monday to Friday
8.30am – 5.30pm

Telephone

Monday to Friday
8.00am – 6.00pm

Opening Hours for North Hertfordshire District Council Offices in Letchworth

Monday to Friday
9.00am – 5.00pm

LOCATA
Housing Services

Translation Facilities

We can make published information available in different languages, Braille and large print upon request. We also have interpreting facilities for people who do not speak English. Telephone 01438 242242 or Textphone 01438 242555 for information.

আমরা মুদ্রিত তথ্যাবলী প্রকাশ করতে পারি যা অনুরোধক্রমে বিভিন্ন ভাষায়, ব্রেইলে এবং বড় প্রিন্টে পাওয়া যাবে। যারা ইংরেজী বলেন না তাদের জন্য আমাদের অনুবাদকের সুবিধাও রয়েছে। তথ্যের জন্য ফোন নম্বর 01438 242242 বা টেক্সটফোন নম্বর 01438 242555।

我们可以应需求，以各种不同的语言，布莱叶盲文以及大字体格式来制作出版资料。我们还可以为那些不会说英语的人士提供便利的口译服务。请致电 01438 242242 或拨打文本电话 01438 242555 来获取相关信息。

વિનંતી મુજબ પ્રકાશિત થયેલ માહિતી અમે જુદી જુદી ભાષામાં, બ્રેઈલમાં અને મોટા અક્ષરના મુદ્રણમાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરાવી શકીએ છીએ. અંગ્રેજી ભાષા ન બોલનાર લોકો માટે અમારી પાસે દુભાષિયાની સેવા પણ છે. માહિતી માટે ફોન કરો 01438 242242 અથવા ટેક્સ્ટફોન 01438 242555.

अनुरोध करने पर हम प्रकाशित जानकारी को विभिन्न भाषाओं, ब्रेल और बड़े अक्षरों में उपलब्ध करा सकते हैं। हमारे पास अंग्रेजी न बोलने वाले व्यक्तियों के लिए दुभाषिया की सुविधा भी है। जानकारी के लिए 01438 242242 पर टेलीफोन करें या 01438 242555 पर टेक्स्टफोन पर बात करें।

ਅਸੀਂ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾਣ ਤੇ, ਵੱਖੋ ਵੱਖ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ, ਬਰੇਲ ਲਿਪੀ ਅਤੇ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਿੰਟਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਸੂਚਨਾ ਛਪਵਾ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ। ਸਾਡੇ ਕੋਲ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਆਂ ਸਹਿਯੋਗਾਂ ਵੀ ਹਨ ਜਿਹੜੇ ਕਿ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਬੋਲਦੇ। ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣ ਲਈ 01438 242242 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ 01438 242555 ਤੇ ਅੱਖਰਫੋਨ ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਕਰੋ।

ہم درخواست کرنے پر مختلف زبانوں، بریل، اورچھاپے کے جلی حروفوں میں شائع شدہ مواد فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔ ہمارے پاس انگریزی نہ بولنے والے افراد کے لئے ترجمانی کی سہولت بھی موجود ہے۔ معلومات کے لئے ٹیلیفون 01438 242242 یا ٹیکسٹ فون 01438 242555 پر بات کریں۔

Welcome to the Home4U User Guide

This guide is designed to assist new housing applicants to understand the Home4U scheme. It is intended as a basic guide to the Home4U scheme. If you would like a full copy of one of the Allocation Schemes or further assistance with understanding the Home4U scheme please either visit the Stevenage Borough Council website on www.stevenage.gov.uk or 01438 242666 or

North Hertfordshire District Council on www.north-herts.gov.uk or 01462 474000

The Home4U Scheme covers the letting of all the social housing in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire.

Social Housing is the name for all the homes that are owned by Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership or by Registered Providers (RP's). Registered Providers are mostly housing associations, although there are some other specialist RP's in the towns.

There is a very high demand in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire for social housing. At the start of 2014 there were approximately 7,500 applicants on the housing registers and we are predicting approximately 900 new or empty homes each year.

The demand for social housing is already much greater than the supply of new or empty homes, and it is growing very quickly, as the number of new applicants who join the Home4U scheme each year is double the number who are housed through the scheme.

Although in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire the costs of buying a home or renting a home or renting a room are high, we recommend to all applicants on the Home4U scheme that you should explore all your other housing options as well as joining this scheme.

Existing tenants in social housing should explore mutual exchanges (i.e. swapping homes with each other), as it is often easier, quicker and cheaper to find a suitable home this way, and in many cases the rules for exchange may allow people to gain or to keep spare rooms, which the Home4U scheme does not allow.

Most of the applicants on the Home4U scheme will probably not be housed or re-housed through the scheme, and most of the applicants who are successful may have to wait several years before they can place a winning bid.

We hope that you find the Home4U scheme easy to use, but we hope too that all users of the Home4U scheme understand that there is not enough social housing in our towns to meet the demand for it.

Private Rented

There are approximately 4,000 properties rented privately in each Local Authority Area. The councils may be able to help a limited number of households with deposits through their rent deposit schemes.

Help to Buy

Homebuy is a government led initiative to help people buy an affordable home through shared ownership. Households with incomes of up to £60,000 may qualify. Details of the scheme are available at www.helptobuyeastandsoutheast.uk or 03333 214 044.

More Advice

Stevenage Borough Council and North Hertfordshire District Council Housing Advice Services offer a free service so if you need help with housing or would like to discuss your housing options please contact the Housing Advice Team in Stevenage on 01438 242242 or email housing.advice@stevenage.gov.uk. In North Herts, contact NHDC on 01462 474682 or email services@north-herts.gov.uk. Their service is free, impartial and confidential.

Helping you find a new home in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire

Home4U gives you more choice about where you want to live. In the past you may have waited on the Housing Register until the Council selected a property for you. Now you can decide which property you would like to be considered for by bidding for it.

Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire District Council and local Registered Social Landlords participate in the Home4U scheme.

When a property is advertised by a different landlord we will make it clear in the advert.

All Stevenage Borough Council homes and those of the North Hertfordshire Partnership

are allocated in this way, so if you want to be re-housed here you will have to take part. You can pick up an application pack in the Customer Service Centres or call them and they will send one to you. You can also download the application form from our websites: **www.stevenage.gov.uk** or **www.north-herts.gov.uk**. The NHHP form can also be completed on-line at this website.

The feedback section at the back of the Home4U magazine will help you to understand the housing situation in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire, see how many properties of each type are available, how many people have applied for them and the band and points level of successful North Herts applicants and the band and priority date of successful Stevenage applicants ("winning bidders").

More Choice – Registered Providers

Registered Providers in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire manage over 11,000 properties with more built or added each year.

These are the main Providers in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire and the approximate number of properties they manage:-

Registered Providers in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire	Number of Properties in Stevenage	Number of general needs properties in North Hertfordshire
Affinity Sutton	522	
Aldwyck Housing	610	93
Circle/South Anglia	90	11
Guinness South	201	136
Hanover	88	
Hightown Praetorian	42	67
Home Group	152	
Housing 21	32	12
Origin Housing	249	1,228
Riversmead Housing Association	34	2
St Pancras & Humanist Housing Association	422	7,196
Stevenage Borough Council	8101	
Welwyn Garden City Housing Association	9	85

* Hanover has sheltered properties in Baldock.

Registered Providers advertise their new or empty homes through the Home4U scheme.

How Home4U works

With Home4U you look for your own home.

There are five steps for you to follow in choosing your new home. There are more details on each section later in the guide:



Step 1 – Membership

You are automatically a member of Home4U if you are accepted onto the Housing Register.

Step 2 – Registration

Once you have applied and been accepted onto the Register you will be registered on the Home4U scheme and allocated a unique Home4U number.

Step 3 – Choosing & Bidding

You can see the available properties on the Home4U website. If you find a property you would like to move to then as long as you are eligible, you can bid for it.

Step 4 – Offers

If your bid is at the top of the list we will invite you to view the property. If you like it and, after all the usual checks, you are eligible, we will offer you the property.

Step 5 – Feedback

In every edition of Home4U we will publish the results of the previous bidding cycles, including how many people bid for each property and the band and points level of successful North Herts bidders and the band and priority date of successful Stevenage bidders.

Feedback

In every edition of Home4U we publish the results of the previous bidding rounds, including how many people have bid for each property and the band and points level of successful North Herts bidders and the band and priority date of successful Stevenage bidders.

You should be able to find all the information you need in this guide, but if you have any questions about Home4U you can contact the Stevenage Customer Service Centre or the Lettings Team at Stevenage Borough Council on **01438 242666** or **www.stevenage.gov.uk**

In North Hertfordshire contact North Hertfordshire District Council on **01462 474000** or at **www.north-herts.gov.uk** or North Hertfordshire Homes on **01462 633397** or **www.nhh.org.uk** or Howard Cottage on **01462 683307** or at **www.howard-cottage.co.uk**

What happens if I am homeless?

Stevenage Borough Council and North Hertfordshire District Council support homeless applicants and can in some situations arrange emergency and/or temporary accommodation.

If we accept a homeless duty you will be expected to use the Home4U scheme to look for an appropriate property as your permanent home.

If you are unable to participate in the Home4U scheme or if you choose not to, we may find and offer a property to you. If you refuse this offer you may not be given another one and the Council may not assist you further. You will have to leave your temporary accommodation and find your own home.

The Home4U Scheme

in more detail

Registration

You are automatically a member of Home4U if Stevenage Borough Council or the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership accepts you onto its Housing Register.

If you do not have a local connection to Stevenage you will not qualify to join the housing register in Stevenage. Unless you're over 55 and seeking sheltered housing, you will no longer be eligible to join North Hertfordshire's Housing Register if you do not have a local connection.

To have a local connection this means:

- You have lived or worked (as a keyworker) in Stevenage continuously for the last five years or have lived in North Hertfordshire for the last twelve months.
- You have a permanent contract of employment in North Hertfordshire.
- You live permanently in a Social Services residential home in North Hertfordshire
- You are a student studying away from home but normally live in Stevenage or North Hertfordshire
- You normally live in North Hertfordshire but are temporarily living away from home:
 - Receiving medical or respite care
 - Living in supported housing
 - In prison
 - Keeping to bail conditions
 - Certain or Former Member of the Armed forces
- You are residing in a Stevenage Women's Aid refuge for a minimum of six months
- You are a young person in the care of Herts County Council who has been placed by another Authority in residential or foster care in Stevenage continuously for the last five years

You will not have a local connection if you are living in Stevenage or North Hertfordshire temporarily, for instance on holiday or receiving hospital treatment here.

If you need information about whether you are eligible to go on the Housing Register please contact Stevenage Borough Council Lettings Team or the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership.

You have the right to appeal against any decisions that we make about your housing application as long as you put the request forward within 21 days. Stevenage will notify you of the outcome within 20 working days and North Hertfordshire within 8 weeks.

Suitability to join the Housing Register

Stevenage Borough Council or North Hertfordshire will consider each new applicant's suitability to join the Housing Register.

This will include the following:

- Looking at the circumstances of the applicant and their household including, a 10 year address history in Stevenage and a 5 year address history in North Hertfordshire.
- Checking that we have been given full, correct and up to date information.

If your behaviour or actions at a previous address in social housing resulted in your eviction or you are considered unsuitable to be a tenant because of unacceptable behaviour you may be excluded from joining the housing register.

Processing your application

We aim to process your application within 10 days of receipt of all documents and information. It is important that you keep the receipt of your application in a safe place for future reference.

When we receive your application form this does NOT mean you have been accepted onto the Housing Register. We do not consider applications until you have supplied all the proofs. If you send us or hand in an application form that is not complete, we will return it to you. It will NOT be considered for registration.

Once we have received your application and all the proofs we need, we will then decide if you are able to join the Housing Register. If you are able to join, your application will be registered and you will be advised of your priority.

Once we have assessed your completed application and we have included you on the Housing Register, we will write to you and tell you your registration date, which band you are in and how many points you have for North Herts applicants and the band and priority date for Stevenage applicants. We will also tell you the size of property you are eligible for, and your unique Home4U number.

If there are any changes to your household, accommodation or personal circumstances, you must contact Stevenage Borough Council or a member of the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership and let us know. You may have to complete another form and provide us with evidence. It is very important that we know what has changed as it may affect the banding, points or priority date you have been awarded, or the type of home you can bid for.

We advertise available properties:

- weekly on the Home4U website every Thursday.
- On the website at **www.home4u.org.uk** from every other Thursday to the following Wednesday at 2.00pm. **Your bids must reach Home4U by 2.00pm on the Wednesday**



We may also be able to send you a personalised sheet of the properties that you can bid for - contact one of the Lettings Teams if you need this service.

We advertise ALL available properties in the Home4U magazine

Reviewing your application

We aim to review your application every year. On or near the anniversary of the date of your application or last review you will receive a review letter from Stevenage Borough Council or North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership.

The letter will ask you to confirm that you remain interested in looking for accommodation through the Home4U scheme and that the details we hold about you and your household remain correct.

It is your responsibility to keep the information we hold about you up to date – applications are often cancelled because people move and fail to inform us of their change of address.

You will need to contact Stevenage Borough Council or the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership either to update your information or to confirm the details are correct. The review letter will tell you how to do this.

The Adverts

The adverts give you information about each property available for letting. We will include a photograph and floor plan if available. You can bid for up to three properties in each issue of the magazine i.e. three per week.

studio flat	
1-1	1
RefNo. 142	
Location	Stevenage
Borough	Stevenage Borough Council
Landlord	Harlow District Council
Rent	£67.87pw
Features	Electric central heating and entry phone but no lift. Easy access to shops and transport. Close to amenities.

Key to advert symbols

Sheltered properties have a white background

Minimum and maximum number of people who can live in this property



Floor level of property, if flat or maisonette



Wheelchair symbol - Suitable for wheelchair users for full time indoor and outdoor mobility

Number of bedrooms in the property

Viewings and Offers

At the end of the bid period all North Herts bids for each property are put in points order, for Band A applicants, then in points order for Band B applicants etc. We call this our 'shortlist' for the property. If two people in the same band have the same number of points, the person who has been registered the longest is put first. All Stevenage bids for each property are put in Band, then date in Band order. If two people have the same date in Band, the person who has been registered the longest is put first.

The Lettings Teams carry out all the necessary eligibility checks to make sure that people are entitled to bid for that size of property, are eligible to be on the Housing Register.

We will invite the top bidders from each shortlist to view the property, usually during the week following the close of bids.

If you bid you should be ready to view it at

short notice.

If the person who was top of the shortlist refuses the property, we then offer it to the next person on the list, and so on. If you appear at the top of more than one shortlist at the same time you will need to decide which property you prefer. We will contact you to ask you.

We will advise you of your right to appeal against any decisions and how to exercise that right. If you do appeal against any decisions, Stevenage will notify you of the outcome within 20 working days and North Hertfordshire within 8 weeks.

In most cases we will not have completed all the repair work in the property to bring it up to the Lettable Standard by the time of the viewing.

The Lettable Standard describes the repair standard which empty homes must reach before we let them.

New Customer Interview

If you like the property you have viewed and are happy to accept it we will arrange a New Customer Interview for you. This is likely to be within a week of your viewing.

At the New Customer Interview you will receive the keys to the property and sign your tenancy contract.

We will speak to you about how we can support you in your new home before you move in.

We will also explain to you the conditions of your tenancy contract and identify your rights and responsibilities.

The New Customer Interview will take up to one hour. You will need to bring proofs of your identity to the interview. We will tell you at the viewing what proofs to bring to your New Customer Interview.

Once you have received the keys to your new home your Housing Application will be cancelled

Stevenage Home4U Feedback Report

You can get information from the website www.Home4U.org.uk on your bid or bids (see 'bidding history' after you have logged in), or contact one of the Customer Service Centres.

Understanding the Feedback Reports

In each edition of Home4U there will be a **Feedback page**. The Feedback contains details of all properties that have been let since the previous edition. This tells you how many people bid for each property as well as the band, points level or priority date of the successful bidder.

Magazine Issue Date

This is the publication date of the Home4U magazine that the advert appeared in.

Advert Reference Number

Combined with the Home4U magazine edition number, this gives a unique identity number to any advert appearing in the magazine.

Property Size and Type

This is simply a description of the property advertised.

Location

This gives an indication of where the property is within Stevenage or North Hertfordshire. We do not give the exact address because the property may still be occupied.

Bids

This is the total number of bids that were made for the property by applicants on the Housing Register.

Letting Information

This shows the band, points and priority date for the successful bidder.

We aim to re-let most empty properties inside 3 weeks. If you are a successful bidder you need to be prepared to move quickly. If you have any questions about how Home4U works or about bidding for properties please contact one of the two Customer Service Centres in person or on 01438 242666 in Stevenage or 01462 474000 in North Hertfordshire.

Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Home4U Feedback Report

Magazine Issue Date	Advert Reference	Size	Property Type	Location	Letting Information		
					Bands	Points (North Herts only)	Priority Date
05-Jan-14	001	1 bed	Flat	Stevenage	A	100	02-Feb-14
05-Jan-14	002	1 bed	Flat	Stevenage	A	250	02-Feb-14
05-Jan-14	003	1 bed	Flat	Stevenage	A	270	02-Feb-14

Bidding

What Type and Size of Property can I bid for?

In the Home4U system you can bid only for properties of a type and size that are suitable to your needs, as shown below. You are informed of which properties these are when your housing application is accepted or reviewed.

Number of Bedrooms	Family Size and Composition
Bungalows	These are reserved to those over 55 in North Hertfordshire or over 60 in Stevenage, or those with a medical need for a ground floor property.
Studio flat	Single person
One bedroom	Single person
	Couple
	Single person or couple with access to child/children
Two bedroom	Family with two children (same sex, both aged under 16)
	Family with two children (different sexes, both aged under 10)
Two bedroom (either one double and one single or two doubles)	Family with one child Related non-couple, i.e brother and sister Couple with independent medical recommendation for separate bedrooms Single person or couple with verified need for a live-in carer
Three Bedroom (two doubles and one single)	Family with two, three or four children
Three bedroom (one double and two singles)	Family with two, three or four children
Three bedroom (three doubles)	Family with two, three or four children
Four bedroom (three doubles and one single)	Family three children, where none can share a bedroom Family four children
Four bedroom (three doubles and one single)	Family with five or more children
Five bedroom any combination	Family with five or more children

There are a very few exceptions to these criteria.
If you need further information please contact Stevenage Borough Council on 01438 242666 or North Hertfordshire District Council on 01462 474000.

What if I am in rent arrears?

If you have housing related debts you may not be eligible to move to another property. Please contact Stevenage Borough Council or one of the Partners in North Hertfordshire if you need more information.



How do I Bid?

Making your bids on the internet

The quickest and easiest way to bid is through our website **www.home4U.org.uk**. Instructions are given on screen but you will need to know your unique Home4U number in order to log on.

On the website there is an online copy of the Home4U magazine and as soon as you choose a property, you can place a bid.

If you made a bid but then change your mind, you can remove the bid (as long as the bidding cycle is still open). You can also view your bidding history once you have logged in.

Free internet access is available at libraries in Stevenage and North Herts and you can also bid online at the Customer Service Centres.



General information

Bid deadline

All bids for properties must reach the Home4U office by 2pm on the closing date shown on the front of each edition of the Home4U magazine. Bids received after this time will not be considered.

Need help bidding?

You can contact Stevenage Customer Service Centre on **01438 242666** or North Hertfordshire Customer Service Centre on **01462 474000** or North Hertfordshire Homes on **01462 633397** or Howard Cottage Housing Association on **01462 683307**. We will be able to help and advise you on how to make your bids and talk you through the bidding process. We may also be able to bid on your behalf or we can work with a friend, family member or advocate to assist you or send you details of the properties you are eligible to bid for each week.

Partners

Lettings Team

Stevenage Borough Council
Daneshill House, Danestrete,
Stevenage, Herts, SG1 1HN
tel: 01438 242666
textphone: 01438 242150
fax: 01438 242384
email: lettings@stevenage.gov.uk

North Hertfordshire District Council

Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City, Herts, SG6 3JF
tel: 01462 474688 or 01462 474000
textphone: 01462 474800
fax: 01462 474546
www.north-herts.gov.uk

www.home4U.org.uk

You can make your bids on the website at the above address. Please ensure you enter your Home4U number and bids correctly.

North Hertfordshire Homes

The Manor House, 21 High Street, Baldock
Herts, SG7 6AZ
tel: 01462 633397
fax: 01462 633586
email: lettings@nhh.org.uk
www.nhh.org.uk

Howard Cottage Housing Association

Pioneer House
Norton Way South
Letchworth Garden City
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